

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
AUSTIN DIVISION**

**CHRISTOPHER G. LEONE
(Travis County No. 17-41758)**

V.

**MAGISTRATE JUDGES OF TRAVIS
COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT,
et al.**

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A-18-CA-560-LY

**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION
OF UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE**

TO: THE HONORABLE LEE YEAKEL
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

The Magistrate Judge submits this Report and Recommendation to the District Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §636(b) and Rule 1(f) of Appendix C of the Local Court Rules of the United States District Court for the Western District of Texas, Local Rules for the Assignment of Duties to United States Magistrate Judges.

Before the Court is Plaintiff's complaint. Plaintiff, proceeding pro se, has been granted leave to proceed in forma pauperis.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

At the time he filed his complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, Plaintiff was confined in the Travis County Correctional Complex in Del Valle, Texas. Plaintiff currently has four criminal cases pending in Travis County. On April 25, 2018, he was found incompetent to stand trial and was

ordered committed to a mental health facility or residential care facility for inpatient observation and treatment for 120 days.

In his complaint Plaintiff sues the Magistrate Judges of Travis County Circuit Court, Judge Grizzard, Psychologist Marissa Mauro, Psychiatrist Tara Wagner, Public Defender Mellisa Farrell, all employees of the Del Valle Correctional Center, Travis County, Del County, Giacomo R. Leone, and the Travis County Jail. Plaintiff seeks a declaratory judgment, a permanent injunction ordering the defendants to cease all violations towards him, and \$1 million from each defendant.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

A. Standard Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)

An in forma pauperis proceeding may be dismissed sua sponte under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e) if the court determines the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted or seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from suit. A dismissal for frivolousness or maliciousness may occur at any time, before or after service of process and before or after the defendant's answer. Green v. McKaskle, 788 F.2d 1116, 1119 (5th Cir. 1986).

When reviewing a plaintiff's complaint, the court must construe plaintiff's allegations as liberally as possible. Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519 (1972). However, the petitioner's pro se status does not offer him "an impenetrable shield, for one acting pro se has no license to harass others, clog the judicial machinery with meritless litigation and abuse already overloaded court dockets." Ferguson v. MBank Houston, N.A., 808 F.2d 358, 359 (5th Cir. 1986).

B. Judicial Immunity

Judge Grizzard and the Magistrate Judges of Travis County Circuit Court are entitled to absolute immunity for any acts performed as judges. It is well settled law that a judge enjoys

absolute immunity from liability for damages for judicial acts performed within his jurisdiction. Hale v. Harney, 786 F.2d 688, 690 (5th Cir. 1986). The doctrine of absolute judicial immunity protects judges not only from liability, but also from suit. Mireless v. Waco, 502 U.S. 9, 11 (1991). Motive of the judicial officer is irrelevant when considering absolute immunity. See Mitchell v. McBryde, 944 F.2d 229, 230 (5th Cir. 1991) (“The judge is absolutely immune for all judicial acts not performed in clear absence of all jurisdiction, however erroneous the act and however evil the motive.”).

Absolute judicial immunity is overcome in only two rather narrow sets of circumstances: first, a judge is not immune from liability for nonjudicial actions, i.e., actions not taken in the judge’s judicial capacity, and second, a judge is not immune for actions, though judicial in nature, taken in complete absence of all jurisdiction. Mireless, 502 U.S. at 11-12. “A judge’s acts are judicial in nature if they are ‘normally performed by a judge’ and the parties affected ‘dealt with the judge in his judicial capacity.’” Boyd v. Biggers, 31 F.3d 279, 285 (5th Cir. 1994) (quoting Mireless, 502 U.S. at 12). In the case at bar, Plaintiff does not complain of any actions taken by Judge Grizzard or the other judges that were nonjudicial in nature nor does he show that they were acting in the clear absence of all jurisdiction.

C. Non-State Actors

With respect to Plaintiff’s claims brought against Public Defender Mellisa Farrell and his father, Giacomo R. Leone, he fails to show they are state actors. The provisions of 42 U.S.C. § 1983 state that every person who acts under color of state law to deprive another of constitutional rights shall be liable to the injured party. A civil rights plaintiff must show an abuse of government power that rises to a constitutional level in order to state a cognizable claim. Love v. King, 784 F.2d 708,

712 (5th Cir. 1986); Williams v. Kelley, 624 F.2d 695, 697 (5th Cir. 1980), cert. denied, 451 U.S. 1019 (1981). Section 1983 suits may be instituted to sue a state employee, or state entity, using or abusing power that is possessed by virtue of state law to violate a person's constitutional rights. Monroe v. Pape, 365 U.S. 167, 184, (1961); accord, Brown v. Miller, 631 F.2d 408, 410-11 (5th Cir. 1980). A private person may be amenable to suit only when the person is a willful participant in joint action with the State or its agents. Dennis v. Sparks, 449 U.S. 24, 27 (1980). In addition, an action which is essentially a tort claim for malpractice against appointed counsel cannot be brought under §1983. See O'Brien v. Colbath, 465 F.2d 358, 359 (5th Cir. 1972); Shapley v. Green, 465 F.2d 874 (5th Cir. 1972).

D. Travis County Jail

The Travis County Jail is not a legal entity capable of being sued. See Guidry v. Jefferson County Detention Center, 868 F. Supp. 189, 191 (E.D. Tex. 1994) (holding that the Jefferson County Detention Center is not a legal entity subject to suit); Darby v. Pasadena Police Dep't, 939 F.2d 311 (5th Cir. 1991) (holding that police and sheriff's departments are governmental subdivisions without capacity for independent legal action).

E. County Liability

Plaintiff sues Del County and Travis County. A political subdivision cannot be held responsible for a deprivation of a constitutional right merely because it employs a tortfeasor; in other words a local government unit cannot be held responsible for civil rights violations under the theory of respondeat superior. Johnson v. Moore, 958 F.2d 92, 94 (5th Cir. 1992). The standard for holding a local government unit responsible under § 1983 requires that there be a custom or policy that caused the plaintiff to be subjected to the deprivation of a constitutional right. Id.; Collins v.

City of Harker Heights, Tex., 916 F.2d 284, 286 (5th Cir. 1990), aff'd, 503 U.S. 115 (1992). Thus, Travis County would violate an individual's rights only through implementation of a formally declared policy, such as direct orders or promulgations or through informal acceptance of a course of action by its employees based upon custom or usage. Bennett v. City of Slidell, 728 F.2d 762, 768 (5th Cir. 1984). A single decision made by an authorized governmental decisionmaker to implement a particular course of action represents an act of official government "policy." Pembaur v. Cincinnati, 475 U.S. 469, 481 (1986). Plaintiff failed to identify a policy, practice or custom of Travis County that caused a deprivation of his constitutional rights.

With respect to "Del County" Plaintiff is simply confused as to the location of the Del Valle Correctional Complex. The Del Valle Correctional Complex is located in and run by Travis County.

F. Remaining Defendants

Plaintiff alleges Psychologist Mauro interviewed him but used "Jeff Futrell's Case," which has nothing to do with the plaintiff. He complains she found him incompetent to stand trial after he was detained for seven months waiting to go to court. Plaintiff asserts he previously was found competent. Plaintiff makes no allegations with respect to Psychiatrist Wagner. With respect to the defendants he identifies as "All Employees of Del Valle Correctional Center" Plaintiff alleges they "acted in concert & participation of everyone involved first person & or had knowledge of goings on & public corrupted conspiracy to save face in the eyes of society."

Section 1983 provides a cause of action to individuals whose federal rights have been violated by those acting under color of state law. Doe v. Dall. Indep. Sch. Dist., 153 F.3d 211, 215 (5th Cir. 1998). Section 1983 is not itself a source of substantive rights; rather, it merely provides a method for vindicating federal rights conferred elsewhere. See Albright v. Oliver, 510 U.S. 266,

271 (1994). In order to state a claim under Section 1983, a plaintiff must (1) allege a violation of rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution or federal law, and (2) demonstrate the alleged deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. Doe, 153 F.3d at 215. Plaintiff has not alleged a valid constitutional violation against Defendants Mauro, Wagner, or the employees of the Del Valle Correctional Center.

RECOMMENDATION

It is therefore recommended that Plaintiff's complaint be dismissed with prejudice for failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e).

It is further recommended that Plaintiff be warned that if Plaintiff files more than three actions or appeals while he is a prisoner which are dismissed as frivolous or malicious or for failure to state a claim on which relief may be granted, then he will be prohibited from bringing any other actions in forma pauperis unless he is in imminent danger of serious physical injury. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

In the event this Report and Recommendation is accepted, adopted or approved, it is recommended that the Court direct the Clerk to e-mail a copy of its order and judgment to the keeper of the three-strikes list.

OBJECTIONS

Within 14 days after receipt of the magistrate judge's report, any party may serve and file written objections to the findings and recommendations of the magistrate judge. 28 U.S.C. § 636 (b)(1)(C). Failure to file written objections to the proposed findings and recommendations contained within this report within 14 days after service shall bar an aggrieved party from de novo review by the district court of the proposed findings and recommendations and from appellate review of factual

findings accepted or adopted by the district court except on grounds of plain error or manifest injustice. Douglass v. United Servs. Auto. Assoc., 79 F.3d 1415 (5th Cir. 1996)(en banc); Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140, 148 (1985); Rodriguez v. Bowen, 857 F.2d 275, 276-277 (5th Cir. 1988).

SIGNED on August 8, 2018.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "ML". It is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

MARK LANE
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE